

Pain relief and your liver

Finding the right pain relief medication can be a tricky business, especially when you add hepatitis C into the mix.

Most medications are processed through the liver, which means people with hepatitis C need to consider the potential risks. All medications, including pain relief, place strain on the liver. Finding a way to ease pain without encouraging liver injury can be difficult.

Pain relief medications have become easy to get. We can buy many over-the-counter pain relievers at our local supermarket. However, there is no definitive guidelines about the best way to treat pain for those with liver disease. As a general rule, the more advanced a person's liver disease is, the greater caution is needed when considering pain relief medications. People with hepatitis C should discuss symptoms and pain management with their doctor.

Your doctor will be able to assess your situation and give advice on the correct dosage, the most appropriate medications and what is likely to have the least impact on your liver.

There are two main types of over-the-counter pain medication.

Acetaminophen

This active ingredient can be found in many over-the-counter and prescription medicines, including pain relievers, cough medicines and cold medicines. It is usually used for pain relief and to reduce fevers, and works by reducing pain signals to the brain.

Examples include paracetamol and Panadol. Codeine can also be included in this group but it is also a mild opioid (another type of pain relief medication). Drugs containing acetaminophen are often used for aches and pains, cold and flu symptoms, neck and back pain and headaches.

High doses of acetaminophen can cause liver injury, even to a healthy liver.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID)

This medication can reduce fevers and act as an anti-inflammatory and blood thinner. It reduces inflammation by blocking enzymes that cause inflammatory pain.

Examples include aspirin and ibuprofen, as well as many medicines taken for colds, sinus pressure and allergies. NSAIDs are often used for headaches, menstrual pain, dental pain, arthritis and minor injuries such as sprains and muscular pain.

This type of drug has been associated with kidney trouble and stomach issues. People who are on blood-pressure medication should ask their doctor before taking it.

Other medication can also interact with pain relievers, affect the way they work, or lead to side-effects. Always follow your doctor's suggestions and the manufacturer's advice when using over-the-counter pain medication. Never exceed the recommended dose and never combine medications.

This information is not intended to replace, supersede or substitute medical advice.



Before taking pain relief medications you could try these natural alternatives:

1. Apply a heat pack to sore muscles, joints or over the liver.
2. Soak in a warm bath with epsom salts.
3. Rub a natural topical pain reliever onto the area of pain.
4. Make sure you have had enough rest as fatigue always worsens pain.
5. For muscular pain, gentle stretching or mild physical activity can deliver the oxygen and blood flow needed for relief.
6. Find a credentialed massage therapist. Massage therapy enhances circulation which helps to reduce physical pain.
7. Complementary and alternative medicines can also help relieve pain, however these should be discussed with your doctor first as some can be toxic to the liver.

